

A REPORT ON THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE

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The following is a shortened version of this report prepared for members of the National Association for Clean Air of South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of words were written, and are being written, about the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. During the Conference itself, estimated tons of paper were required by the Secretariat to record and disseminate information on the proceedings. Offhand it would seem that any additional words on the Conference would be redundant. But the Conference meant entirely different things to different people, and it was an extremely important milestone in the history of man. It unquestionably will have a profound effect on the international aspects of air pollution control in the years ahead, and a few additional words relating the Conference to the Air Pollution Control Association of the United States and Canada and to its sister national air pollution prevention organizations around the world seem desirable.

CONFERENCE SETTING

As thousands of persons converged on Stockholm from the four corners of the earth during the first days of June, 1972, they found that a determined Swedish people had done their preparatory work well. The beautiful City of Stockholm was immaculately clean. Spring flowers were in full bloom. Flags of the United Nations and its member states were prominently flown on the principal streets and atop numerous buildings. An augmented police force was courteous and polite to all of Stockholm's guests, but firm in the maintenance of discipline and order. The Swedish Preparatory Committee had readily available pamphlets and brochures for Conference participants, provided transportation from the airport to the hotels and between hotels and the buildings which housed Conference activities, and manned desks at the airport, hotels, and principal buildings of Stockholm to provide personal attention to the comfort and pleasure of the guests. Invitations were

awaiting accredited delegates, observers, and members of the press for governmental receptions, opera, the symphony, and the museums and art galleries. And just about everywhere in central Stockholm was displayed the "Only One Earth" symbol of the Conference, laurel wreaths surrounding a white circle containing a single human figure with outstretched arms. The symbol was on buildings, in store windows, on menus, flags, wearing apparel, commemorative plates, stamps, medallions, newspapers, stationery. The organization, hospitality, and public relations efforts were superb, flawless. They left no doubt that something important was going on in Stockholm and that that something concerned the "Only One Earth" available to mankind.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CONFERENCE

One hundred six (106) recommendations were approved by the Conference. These recommendations will be included in the action plans and reports of the Conference; a discussion, or even a listing, of these recommendations would go far beyond the scope of this summary presentation. Rather, a few of the recommendations which I believe will have important impact upon environmental protection and air pollution control will be mentioned.

Broad recommendations

A few of the broad-scale recommendations and/or actions reached, include the following:

The adoption of a Declaration on the Human Environment of 25 principles to "inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment".

The establishment of a world-wide network of at least 110 atmospheric monitoring stations "to keep watch on changes that might lead to climate modification, the release of toxic substances such as heavy metals (including mercury) and organochlorides (such as DDT) ..."

The establishment of an International Environmental Referral Service to link institutions or persons in one country who wish specific information about the environment with those elsewhere who could provide such data.

The creation of a 54-nation Governing Council for Environmental Programs, a voluntary Environment Fund of \$100,000,000 for five years to finance the programs, a small secretariat to carry out the day-to-day work, and procedures to coordinate the many and diverse activities of the United Nations Agencies concerned with the environment.

The establishment of an international program in environmental education through the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the promotion of the training of technicians to handle environmental matters.

The observance of a World Environment Day on June 5 of each year.

The provision of assistance to the developing nations to speed up, without adverse environmental effects, the exploration, exploitation, processing, and marketing of their natural resources.

The provision of assistance to governments of the world to develop common international standards on products of significance in foreign trade, and the use of testing and certification procedures to avoid arbitrary and discriminatory actions that might affect the trade of developing countries.

More specific recommendations

The Third Committee was concerned with the Identification and Control of Pollutants of Broad International Significance subject area. It recommended and the Conference approved the following recommendations relating to air pollution and air pollution control:

The review and coordination by the United Nations of co-operative efforts of governments to carry out control programs for pollutants which cross national boundaries and the encouragement of the establishment of mechanisms for the implementation of concerted abatement programs.

The provision to governments by the United Nations of information on pollutants in the environment to lead to effective control.

The appointment by the United Nations of expert bodies to "assess the exposures, risks, pathways and sources" of pollutants of international significance. This recommendation included the use of international programs to monitor the accumulation of hazardous compounds at representative sites and the development of "international test schedules and techniques to permit more meaningful comparisons of data gathered by different nations."

The establishment of "agreed procedures for setting safety limits for common air and water contaminants," including the use by governments of internationally proposed standards in the establishment of national standards for pollutants of international significance.

The designation of "networks of research centers and biological reserves" to "provide knowledge about the behavior and effects of pollutants on the world's animal and plant life."

The exchange by governments, through the United Nations, of information on their pollution research and control activities, and the provision of assistance to other governments "in international assessment schemes."

The development of monitoring and research to facilitate the "early warning and prevention of the deleterious effects of pollutants, including the provision of assistance by the World Health Organization (WHO) to governments in the monitoring of air and water in areas where health might be threatened, in the establishment of environmental health protection standards, and in the co-ordination of an international system to "correlate medical, environmental, and family-history data."

The cooperative effort of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the WHO in establishing research and monitoring programs to provide information on rising trends of food contamination, including additional support to FAO for work "on international standards for pollutants in food and on a code of ethics for international food trade."

The use by governments of the world of the "best practicable means" to minimize the release of toxic or dangerous substances, especially

persistent ones such as heavy metals (including mercury) and organochlorine compounds (including those found in DDT and other insecticides), until it has been demonstrated that their release will not give rise to unacceptable risks or unless their use is essential to human health or food production, in which case appropriate control measures should be applied."

The development by the United Nations of plans for an International Registry of Data on Chemicals in the Environment "based on a collection of production figures on the most harmful chemicals and data about the environmental behaviour of the most important man-made chemicals from factory to ultimate disposal or recirculation."

In adjourning the Conference, President Bengtsson made the following statements:

We have now come to the end of this first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. We can justly be satisfied with its results. During the two eventful weeks which lie behind us many important decisions have been taken which will shape and guide the efforts of the international community to protect and improve the human environment. These decisions taken together represent the fulfilment of the objectives entrusted to us by the General Assembly.

The success of the Conference on the Human Environment offers great hope both for further joint international action in this immensely important area and for the strengthening of the United Nations as a whole. The decisions we have adopted here were the result of a process which started in 1968 and which does not come to an end today. Our common endeavours must continue without interruption and we have now laid a solid foundation for the next phase of our work. I am sure that we all look forward to pursuing those efforts with the full participation of all members of the international community.

I think we may distinguish three major steps in the process begun four years ago by the United Nations to tackle the problems of the human environment. The first, in 1968, was the decision by the

General Assembly to convene this Conference. The second was the establishment of the Preparatory Committee in 1970. This Conference itself is the third. But all this is only the beginning. The really important task is still ahead. The many decisions we have taken here require immediate action. In thanking you all for creating the conditions which made these decisions possible I sincerely wish you success in the vital task before you.

I declare closed the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.